

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Larry Darnell Jones II, #313549,)	C/A No.: 1:11-2476-TMC-SVH
)	
Petitioner,)	
)	
vs.)	
)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
State of South Carolina,)	
)	
Respondent.)	
)	

Petitioner, proceeding *pro se*, filed this petition seeking a writ of habeas corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2)(d) (D.S.C.), the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the district judge. For the reasons that follow, the undersigned recommends that the district judge dismiss the petition in this case without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

I. Factual and Procedural Background

Petitioner pled guilty to murder and was sentenced January 25, 2006 in Aiken County. [Entry #1 at 1]. He did not file a direct appeal. *Id.* at 2. Therefore, the date on which the challenged judgment became final was February 6, 2006. *See* South Carolina Appellate Court Rules, Rule 203(b)(2) and Rule 263. Petitioner filed an ultimately unsuccessful application for post-conviction relief (PCR) January 25, 2008 in Aiken County General Sessions, after two years had lapsed. [Entry #1 at 3].

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of this petition pursuant to the Rules Governing Section 2254 Proceedings for the United States District Court, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), Pub. L. No. 104-132, 110 Stat. 1214, and other habeas corpus statutes. *Pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978). A federal court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. *Fine v. City of N.Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so. Nevertheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 390–91 (4th Cir. 1990).

B. Analysis

With respect to his conviction and sentence, a petitioner's sole federal remedy is a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 or 28 U.S.C. § 2254, which can be sought only after a petitioner has exhausted his state court remedies. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b);

Picard v. Connor, 404 U.S. 270 (1971); *Braden v. 30th Judicial Circuit Court*, 410 U.S. 484, 490–491 (1973) (exhaustion required under 28 U.S.C. § 2241).

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (“AEDPA”) substantially modified procedures for consideration of habeas corpus petitions of state inmates in the federal courts. One of those changes was the amendment of 28 U.S.C. § 2244 to establish a one-year statute of limitations for filing habeas petitions. Subsection (d) of the statute now reads:

(d)(1) A 1-year period of limitation shall apply to an application for a writ of habeas corpus by a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court. The limitation period shall run from the latest of--

(A) the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review;

(B) the date on which the impediment to filing an application created by State action in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the applicant was prevented from filing by such State action;

(C) the date on which the constitutional right asserted was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if the right has been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or

(D) the date on which the factual predicate of the claim or claims presented could have been discovered through the exercise of due diligence.

(2) The time during which a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending shall not be counted toward any period of limitation under this subsection.

28 U.S.C. § 2244(d).

The United States Supreme Court has acknowledged that district courts are “permitted, but not obliged, to consider, *sua sponte*, the timeliness of a state prisoner’s habeas petition.” *Day v. McDonough*, 547 U.S. 198, 209 (2006); *see also Eriline Co.*

S.A. v. Johnson, 440 F.3d 648, 655 (4th Cir. 2006) (carving out habeas corpus petitions and *in forma pauperis* complaints as narrow circumstances to permit *sua sponte* consideration of statute of limitations when defense is clear on face of petition or complaint). The *Day* Court further instructs that “before acting on its own initiative, a court must accord the parties fair notice and an opportunity to present their positions.” *Day*, 547 U.S. at 210. Similarly, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has mandated caution in *sua sponte* dismissals of untimely petitions under the AEDPA:

[W]hen a federal habeas court, acting *sua sponte*, dismisses a § 2254 action as untimely without notice to or input from the petitioner, the court cannot be certain that there are no circumstances that would cause the petition to be timely. The district court ought at least to inquire whether there are any facts not apparent to the court that militate against the application of the limitations bar.

McMillan v. Jarvis, 332 F.3d 244, 249 (4th Cir. 2003); *Hill v. Braxton*, 277 F.3d 701 (4th Cir. 2002).

The AEDPA’s statute of limitations is subject to equitable tolling, which could, in effect, extend the final date for filing. *Lindh v. Murphy*, 521 U.S. 320 (1997); *Harris v. Hutchinson*, 209 F.3d 325 (4th Cir. 2000). Petitioner could be entitled to equitable tolling of the statute of limitations if he were to present facts of “(1) extraordinary circumstances, (2) beyond his control or external to his own conduct, (3) that prevented him from filing on time.” *Rouse v. Lee*, 339 F.3d 238, 246 (4th Cir. 2003).

The standard habeas petition form (AO-241) requests information in question #18 pertaining to the timeliness of the petition, as follows: “If your judgment of conviction became final over one year ago, you must explain why the one-year statute of limitations as contained in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d) does not bar your petition.” The footnote to the question provides the text of § 2244(d).

In response to question #18, Petitioner states that he did not know about any limitations period, as his attorney did not inform him of one. [Entry #1]. Petitioner continues the timeliness argument with statements he makes throughout the petition, alleging that he committed the murder in response to brainwashing and messages from his “television, radio, family, friends, neighbors, and the computer in [his] kitchen” which told him to kill the victim. [Entry #1 at 21].

In an unpublished case, the Fourth Circuit found extraordinary circumstances existed when a clerk of court erroneously failed to place an otherwise timely § 2254 petition on the docket, thus rendering it untimely. *Parmaei v. Jackson*, 378 Fed. Appx. 331 (4th Cir. 2010). As the petitioner in *Parmaei* had made every effort to timely file his petition, and was impeded only by circumstances outside of his control, the Fourth Circuit found the limitations period was equitably tolled. *Parmaei*, 378 Fed. Appx. at 332.

No similar argument has been presented in the instant case. The only relevant assertion Petitioner makes in response to question #18 is that he was ignorant of the limitations period. However, it is a long-established rule that “ignorance of the law is no excuse.” *See Marrero Morales v. Bull Steamship Company*, 279 F.2d 299 (1st Cir. 1960)

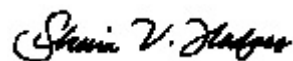
(principle is equally applicable to ignorance of substantive rights and procedural issues). Further, Petitioner makes no compelling argument that this ignorance was outside of his control.

In order to provide the required “fair notice,” Petitioner was given the opportunity by order of the undersigned dated November 15, 2011, to show cause why his case should not be dismissed on timeliness grounds. However, Petitioner responded only by reiterating the argument presented in the petition that he was ignorant of the limitations period. [Entry #13]. In light of the absence of any extraordinary circumstances beyond Petitioner’s control that would militate in favor of equitably tolling the limitations period, the undersigned recommends the instant petition be dismissed as untimely.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that this case be dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

IT IS SO RECOMMENDED.



January 20, 2012
Columbia, South Carolina

Shiva V. Hodges
United States Magistrate Judge

**The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”**

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); *see* Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).